

This Week in Congress

July 16, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House passed legislation this week to extend a federal housing voucher program for low-income Americans and voted to withdraw most U.S. troops from Iraq by next spring. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Kansans Need Relief from High Fuel Costs

As the price of oil reached an eleven month high of \$75 per barrel last week, I called on congressional leaders Wednesday to stop stalling and enact energy policy legislation that reduces our dependence on foreign oil. The cost of fuel to get to work, heat and cool homes, and operate farm machinery is felt immediately by working families when energy prices increase. If we can replace even a portion of the oil we import from volatile regions with domestic oil, natural gas and renewable energy, we can reduce drastic price swings and

decrease the adverse effect on Kansans.

America needs comprehensive energy policy that emphasizes conservation and renewable fuels, increases domestic exploration and production and expands refinery capacity. While it has been said that we cannot "drill our way out of this problem," it is also impossible to solve this problem by conservation or renewable energy alone. It will take a combination of all of these initiatives together to move away from our reliance on foreign oil.

[Click here](#) to read more about my goals for energy policy. You can also watch my remarks to the House by [clicking here](#).

Manhattan Selected as Finalist for National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility

On Wednesday, Kansas received great news that Manhattan was chosen by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as a site finalist for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). This \$451 million, 500,000 square-foot federal research laboratory would be a tremendous opportunity for our state to advance the science of defending against animal and plant diseases, as well as to gain economically from the addition of up to 500 well-paying, scientific, federal jobs. NBAF will be a state-of-the-art bioscience research lab and will be a home for scientists from DHS, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The selection of Manhattan as a finalist for NBAF confirms our state's leadership in agriculture and bioscience research. I commend community, state and federal leaders for their efforts to showcase Manhattan and the advantages our state has to offer.

Five sites, including Manhattan, are now being considered by DHS. A final site announcement is expected in 2008. As a member of the Kansas NBAF Task Force, which has the goal of bringing the federal research facility to Kansas, I will continue working to promote the attributes of our Kansas site.

Working to Provide Disaster Assistance to Farmers and Ranchers in Southeast Kansas

This week, I urged the Speaker of the House to include funding for farmers and ranchers affected by the flooding in Southeast Kansas in the recently passed disaster assistance bill. As it stands now, disaster assistance is available for livestock losses that occurred before February 28, 2007 and for crop losses that occurred to crops planted before February 28, 2007. An extension of the qualification deadline for agriculture disaster assistance is desperately needed by the producers hit hard by recent flooding.

Hardly any part of Kansas has been spared from a natural disaster this year. The floods affecting Southeast Kansas not only devastated homes and businesses, but also destroyed crops and livestock. The producers affected by this devastating flood are no less deserving of assistance than any other producer in the United States who experienced losses over the last three years.

Investigating the Safety of the J-1 Visa Program

I met with State Department officials this week to discuss the J-1 Visa program, which allows international medical graduates to stay in the U.S. in exchange for three years of practicing medicine in areas experiencing a shortage of doctors. After the recent bomb plot suspects in London were found to be medically trained, safety concerns were raised about this important program to Kansas. I wanted an update on the screening process and tracking system, as well as to find out if there are problems that need to be fixed. While the J-1 visa program has been a valuable resource for Kansans, it is important that proper safety precautions are in place.

Thanks to Suzanne Palmieri, Policy Coordinator, Tony Edson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services, and Stanley Colvin of the Education and Cultural Affairs Office with the State Department for the update.

President Extends Disaster Eligibility Timeline

At my urging, President Bush on Friday extended the timeline for disaster assistance eligibility for Kansans that were victimized by flooding and tornadoes during the month of May. Damages suffered from May 4 to June 1 can now be considered for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assistance. Previously it was only for storms through May 18, but I visited with FEMA officials to explain that many parts of our state were hit by later storms and needed assistance as well. I am pleased that additional individuals and communities will receive needed assistance as they work to recover from the May storms.

A list of counties eligible for Individual and Public Assistance is available by [clicking here](#) .

Visiting with Lawrence Residents, Accepting Spirit of Enterprise Award

On Tuesday morning, I spoke to Lawrence Chamber of Commerce members during a summer breakfast at the Lawrence Arts Center. While there, I was presented with the "Spirit of Enterprise" award from the United States Chamber of Commerce. The award recognizes support for efforts that create jobs, increase productivity and strengthen the economy. I appreciated the opportunity to speak with more than 70 people about progress of the Iraqi government, immigration reform, the 2007 Farm Bill and the No Child Left Behind Act. Thank you to Brett Sayre, AT&T Director of External Affairs, and Phil Struble, Chairman of the Government and Community Affairs Committee, as well as Lawrence Chamber of Commerce

President Lavern Squier and his staff for arranging the meeting.

Supporting Legislation to Make College More Affordable

The House passed legislation this week to cut interest rates in half over the next five years on subsidized student loans and to increase Pell grants for college students. The bill also provides needed funding for Upward Bound programs in Kansas. Upward Bound provides opportunities for young people to succeed in school and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. I will continue to look for ways to make college more affordable and attainable for all Kansas students.

Agriculture Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Energy Futures Markets

As the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I joined other committee members this week in a hearing to review trading in energy markets. The Subcommittee heard from various groups including the Commodities Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), commodity exchanges and commodity traders. We gathered information on how the energy markets are currently operating and whether CFTC has the necessary tools to conduct proper oversight of the energy markets. It is the responsibility of Congress to make sure the CFTC has the necessary authority to protect the public and market users from manipulation and fraud so that the market remains open and competitive.

Speaking to Students of Bennington High School

On Wednesday, I had the pleasure of visiting with students of Bennington High School in Washington, D.C. to tour our nation's capital. I talked with the students about my role as their representative in Congress and answered questions important to the youth, teachers and parents that accompanied them. It is important that from a young age our students have an understanding of how our government works and realize the significance of their participation in our democracy. Thanks to Rick Reed, a teacher at McPherson High School, for bringing the students to Washington and to all the parents and teachers that made the trip possible.

Recognizing Supporters and Instructors of the High Plains Band Camp

This weekend, I attended a reception to recognize the sponsors and faculty of the annual High Plains Band Camp at Fort Hays State University (FHSU). For sixty years, middle and high school students from across Kansas have come to FHSU to be instructed by nationally recognized musicians and music instructors from across our state. This year, more than 240 students are expected to attend. The camp encourages development of talent in young people and results in a series of concerts next weekend. Thanks to Camp Director Kay Werth, Secretary Michelle Postier and all the faculty and counselors for their efforts on behalf of young Kansans.

Visiting Washington County Hospital

After returning to Kansas Friday morning, I visited the Washington County Hospital to tour the facility and learn more about plans to build a new facility in Washington. Access to healthcare is one of the most important issues facing rural America. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with Administrator Everett Lutjemeier and Board Chairman Ted Lillie about the hospital's commitment to continue serving the residents of Washington County and north central Kansas.

In the Office

Lou Ann Kibbee and Jennifer and Aslee Martinson of Hays, Stephanie Sanford and Roger Frischenmeyer of Hutchinson and Don Dew and Brad Rohr of Gorham were in with the National Council on Independent Living to talk about legislation that would help individuals with disabilities live more independently. Gary Brunk of Topeka was in with Kansas Action for Children to advocate for keeping food stamp benefits. Troy Schroeder of Albert and Doyle Brown of Jennings were in with Kansas Rural Center to share their thoughts on the 2007 Farm Bill and to talk about what changes they would like to see made in the upcoming reauthorization.

Joseph Pinaire of Junction City was in to tell me about his experience as a congressional intern in Washington, D.C. Alan Sobba, originally of Garnett, was in with International Swaps & Derivatives Association to discuss the hearing on energy derivatives. Kenlon Johannes and Dennis Hupe of Topeka, Bob Henry of Robinson, Lance Rezac of Onaga, Criag Gigstad of Valley Falls and Raylen Phelon of Melvern were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to talk about how the farm bill can best meet the needs of soybean growers in Kansas.

Many Kansans stopped by my office for a tour of the United States Capitol building. Alan, Kathy, Nathan and Ryan Hoffman of Hoisington; Steve, Penny and Heidi Schroeder of Hillsboro; and Dale, Donna, Derek, Debra and Dustin Ohl of Hutchinson, came by, as did Tom and Kay Cure of Salina. Ken and Joan Burton of Lyons; Kelly, Kristin and Bryce Arnold of Shawnee; Milt and Marilyn Calhoun of Wichita; and Dirk, Karen and Bret Hanson of Wamego also stopped by for a tour. In from Ulysses were Jean Franco and her children, Jackie Russell, Joceline Wickard, Christian, Steve, and Aurora Franco; and Joe Russell.

Very truly yours,

Jerry